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I Love My Brick of Anger!

Luke 6:27-38; 1 Peter 5:5-7

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This morning I would like to do some role-play with you. I am going to step into a role and talk with you and then step out of that role and say a few more things. OK. I want you to see me as someone whom you have never met. I want you to see me as older and stooped over. And I want you to look at me and see this … rope around my ankle and note that at the other end of this rope is a heavy brick. Ready, set, imagine.

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"Hi, I guess you're probably wondering about this thing chained to my ankle. It used to be a lot smaller. In fact, it was just a pebble in my shoe when I first noticed it. When it got to the size of a rock I took it out of my shoe and let it hang here, and now that it has got to the size of a brick, I just drag it around with me wherever I go.

Oh, it's not so bad. You can get used to anything. At least, that's what people say, but I don't know if it's true. For instance, I never got used to my parents playing favorites. My little sister was always the golden child, and I was the tin man. Now my parents want to know why I never come around, like I'm supposed to forgive and forget.

Some things you never forgive. Like my ex-wife. It wasn't bad enough she ran around on me, but then she took me to the cleaners in the divorce. And when it was all over she had the gall to ask me if we couldn't still be friends. Couldn't we be civil? Couldn't we be kind? Just for the kids?

No way! When somebody sticks it to me I don't forget, and I don't want her to forget either. O, don't get me started. My parents, my ex-wife, my boss, that thieving real estate agent. You wouldn't believe the list I've got tucked away, the list of people who've kicked me around.

But we were talking about something else. You were wondering about this thing on my ankle. I don't know exactly what it is. I went to see my pastor about it, but he started talking about forgiveness. If I didn't learn to give forgiveness, then I'd never learn how to accept forgiveness. The measure you give is the measure you get back. Da da da da da. If I didn't at least try to make peace with the people around me, how could I ever be at peace with myself or with God? Da da da da da.

I haven't been back to see *him*. If the only way to get rid of this burden is to forgive those people, then I'll just keep it! I don't care how big it gets. I'll carry it to my last breath. It's the principle of the thing.

I heard a story once about a pawn broker who hated his neighbor. One day the pawn broker took in some trinket - a silver ring - and it turned out to have magical powers. The pawn broker could have anything he wanted, but no matter what he wished for, his neighbor would receive twice as much. The pawn broker wished for a million dollars, but he couldn't enjoy it, knowing that his hated neighbor now had two million. He wished for a house by the sea, but he found no pleasure in it knowing that his enemy now had two houses by the sea.

The pawn broker brooded on this for weeks until one night in a stroke of genius, he rubbed the magic ring and said, "I wish I could go blind in one eye, lame in one leg, and deaf in one ear!" And so the pawn broker limped through life half-blind and half-deaf, but he was content knowing that his enemy suffered twice as much. YES!

This thing on my ankle, it's not so bad. It's not that heavy. And as long as I hang onto this, they don't go free. They keep paying for what they've done to me, and I am content."

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I'm going to step out of the role now. I don't want to be that character, not for a minute longer, not even pretending. That's not who I wish to be. Is that who you want to be? No? Then don't be. Maybe there are people you have the right to hate. But … how much is it worth to you to be in the right? Is it worth dragging around that burden for the rest of your life?

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. I believe that. But I also believe that my experience of being *forgiven* is somehow tied up with my willingness to be *forgiving*. The measure I receive from God is linked to the measure I give to others. We are all forgiven servants. Having been forgiven by the Master, don't you think life would be a little easier if we learned how to forgive one another?

I have been struggling with my feelings about the Presbytery of Sacramento. I believe that their process with me a few years back was fatally flawed, that people perjured themselves in the case because they didn't like my politics, and I believe the end result was unjust. Yet, as many of you know, I have submitted myself to the discipline of my peers and have completed their assigned tasks, and have done so with integrity. But there are still hard feelings. Yet, I have *also* submitted myself to Jesus Christ, and in His Word there are these exhortations (in Luke 6) to bless those who have cursed me, and pray for those who have mistreated me.

In Luke, it's not that you have to have been cursed or mistreated while serving God. It's simply *any* cursing that comes your way, or *any* mistreatment that befalls you, for whatever reason. A few verses before, in last week's sermon, we saw how at least one of the blessings accrue to you because you get insulted or excluded or rejected while you are representing Jesus. But that kind of connection isn't the case here, in verse 27 and following, in this section on loving your enemies. Here there is no sense that the mistreatment that befalls you comes because you have been defending Jesus. So it may be that you have done something that deserves a curse or deserves hate. Or it may be you have done nothing to warrant any hurtful response. The point Jesus is making is that, really, it doesn't matter.

Why doesn't it matter? It doesn't matter because the kingdom of God isn't about fairness, about a quid pro quo. The kingdom of God is about God, and it is God's character that is the rule to which we are bound. And the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have decided to extend love, even as they love within the Trinity. God's character is to love, and so if we wish to

belong to God, we will imitate God. *The premise is that if we imitate the workings of the Trinity, we will become the real, concrete, fully human people God designed us to be*. If, on the other hand, we try to get God to adapt to us, then we will become less than human - we will become something God didn't design. When we try to get God to adapt to us, we engage in idolatry. When we adapt to God, we engage in discipleship.

Jesus urges us to follow God here because he knows that if we do, we will become free. Perfect love casts out fear, holding back love hangs onto fear. And fear becomes a brick around our ankle, affecting everything we do, everyone we know, and it even affects our physical health.

In the second reading from 1 Peter, we are reminded to humble ourselves under God's almighty hand. We'll sing about this in a few minutes, so I urge you to pay special attention now. Humility is the recognition that we don't know enough to accurately discern, either our actions and thoughts, or the actions and thoughts of those around us. So, I am struggling with my own pain, my own fears which I have not let go, and my own hubris in thinking that my perspective is wholly accurate. I see that though I don't really want to have this brick around my ankle, it's there, and as I struggle with all of this, I come to remember whose I am - I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, and in both of these passages God is speaking to me, and inviting me to love and inviting me to humility. When I think about it, I am pretty sure he can be trusted.

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